

National Recovery Month

Prevention Works • Treatment is Effective • People Recover

september 2012

JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

It's Worth It

PERSONAL STORIES
ABOUT RECOVERY



Join The Voices For Recovery

This September marks the 23rd annual **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** observance, sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**. This initiative raises awareness about the mental and/or substance use disorders that affect millions of individuals, as well as their families, and celebrates those in recovery.

This year's theme, ***"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"*** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and substance use disorders are significant and valuable. People in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in meaningful ways to their communities. They also prove to family members, friends, and others that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

The following narratives provide a personal perspective on the benefits of treatment and recovery. While every story is unique, they all illustrate this year's **Recovery Month** theme by showing the positive impact of recovery on individuals, families, and communities. These stories are an inspiration to take action and seek treatment for a mental and/or substance use disorder, or help a loved one in need.

Adam J. Deveau

BRIDGTON, ME

The ancient symbol known as “yin-yang” illustrates that our reality operates in a constant struggle to maintain balance. When our physiological balance is thrown off by using drugs to induce happiness, our internal equilibrium must regain balance by following that pleasure with extreme feelings of despair.

Eventually, I came to realize that my drug-induced highs were nowhere near good enough to justify all my abysmal lows. My mornings used to begin with a race between my eyes opening and my withdrawals starting. Between using my first drug, finding my favorite drug, and hitting rock bottom, I was someone who wanted help for so many reasons.

I discovered that medication-assisted treatment could support my recovery from addiction. Methadone maintenance treatment has given me a second chance at happiness and has taught me to value long-term, sustainable contentment above short-term, shallow, drug-induced pleasure.

I continue to be committed to my recovery because I love my family, my country, and the compassionate recovery community who has supported me. The moral of my story is that with treatment and counseling I have been able to stay alive, keep my job, earn my bachelor's degree in philosophy, and pursue happiness. If I had stayed on drugs, my story was destined to be a tragedy about a person falling far short of their potential.

Charles B. Thornton

Director, The Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs
WASHINGTON, DC



As a talented point guard in high school, I had tremendous opportunities in front of me. However, the lure of the streets, with their promise of easy money, peer pressure, nightlife, alcohol, and drugs, was simply too much to overcome.

And so began an 11-year revolving door odyssey in and out of jail for typical drug user offenses. I was a poster child for recidivism. In 1990, I was again paroled and everyone, including me, believed that I would be back in jail in short order. However, in less than 1 year, I completely turned my life around and was irreversibly moving in the right direction.

Unlike before, I tapped into a combination of public-private services, training, and mentoring programs. This was the essential difference! Programs such as **Alcoholics Anonymous** and **Narcotics Anonymous** provided guidance, direction, and moral support in addressing my underlying addictions. My sponsor provided temporary Oxford-model housing, which both physically removed me from a risky environment and provided mentoring support. Home was truly a safe place.

I was hired for my first real job as a building maintenance worker, which provided the foundation for my career. Additional study and licensing put me in a position to work as chief building engineer at three different companies. I've since worked as a real estate agent, developer, entrepreneur, and currently, in the non-profit sector.

I now enjoy the love, support, and respect of my family and friends. I have rebuilt my relationship with my high-school sweetheart, and now the same two teenagers who brought a little girl into this world in 1978 are married, responsible adults. I'm active in a spiritual program, and most importantly, support multiple community recovery organizations and volunteer at the Department of Corrections.

As I've been able to quietly, and without fanfare, give back to my community tenfold, I am ever mindful of that spiritual axiom that states that "from those who have received much, much is expected."

Eric McDaniel

Program Coordinator, Faces & Voices of Recovery
WASHINGTON, DC



I have been in recovery since February 10, 2008, and it has completely changed my life for the better. I come from a family with a history of alcoholism, and I drank – and blacked out – for the first time when I was 9 years old.

I started drinking again as an 18-year old college freshman. I could never control my drinking. Once I started, I never knew when I would stop, or what I might do.

After law school, it took only 2 years for my alcoholism and depression to turn a promising young trial lawyer, good friend, and devoted husband into an isolated and suicidal 29-year old with little hope. But God sent me a therapist who happened to specialize in trauma and addiction, and she told me where to find help. After a failed suicide attempt, I went to treatment and started to receive care for my illness.

With the help of other people in recovery, I have learned to practice a new way of living without alcohol. I found an **Oxford House** that supported my recovery while I worked toward regaining my independence. My life is not perfect, but recovery has given me a second chance to face challenges with a measure of grace and gratitude. I have the capacity to help others, and to ask for (and accept) help when I need it. I have been able to pursue my dream of working in public policy, and I now use my education and experiences in my work as a recovery advocate. I share my recovery with others, and encourage them to speak out about issues that matter to our community. Recovery has given my life new meaning and purpose.

“My life is not perfect, but recovery has given me a second chance to face challenges with a measure of grace and gratitude.”

Frank Ryan

VP of Clinical Services, Loyola Recovery Foundation
PITTSFORD, NY

I'm in recovery from alcoholism, and have not had a drink since December 20, 1977. This is not my accomplishment alone – a number of people and places contributed to my recovery.

My family still can't tell me which came first – a drink of alcohol or a step. At the time, they thought it was cute when I would crawl around and take sips of beer from cans on the floor. They did not think it was cute when I got drunk at age 13. Serving in the Navy did not change my drinking or thinking, and at times, I lived in the street. After a brief trip to the **Norris Clinic** in 1977, I promised myself I would not drink, and for the next 5 months, I didn't. But eventually, I told myself that I had earned a drink. I drank a small bottle, which turned into another bottle, and the next thing I knew, I was in another state. The only thought I had was there had to be a better way to die.

After friends found me, I returned home with them and entered the Norris Clinic again. The clinic and my friends played a trick on me – while I wanted a better way to die, they taught me a way to live. It was a slow process that included going to treatment and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, finding a sponsor, and for the first time, taking suggestions.

We all have to face life's problems and learn to cope without alcohol or drugs. I had to face the loss of my parents, a wife, son, and grandson without the use of alcohol. I also faced the serious illness of my second wife, almost losing her. The list of problems that come along might be endless, but it is about life.

I now have a family, children, and grandchildren who not only love me, but respect me. I've had a career for 30 years and have not been fired. I have been able to gain self-respect and the respect of others. Changing my whole life was not easy, but the end result was well worth it.

Ian

MINNEAPOLIS, MN



I've been clean, sober, and in recovery since that day 5 years ago when I walked into my doctor's office beaten down by my addiction and finally asking for help. At 30 years old, and after 15 years of drug addiction, I started taking Suboxone. I had been attending 12-step group meetings, but after years of heroin and pill addiction, numerous drug treatments, and chronic relapses, I made the difficult decision to supplement my recovery with medication. Although I feared judgments from others in recovery, Suboxone has saved my life.

While medication-assisted treatment is a significant part of my recovery, staying sober depends on more than just medication. I do service work, go to meetings, and surround myself with supportive people to avoid using substances.

Medication-assisted treatment is the best decision I've made in a long time. I know I wouldn't be where I am today without the help from my doctors and the medication-assisted treatment program, which has stopped my cravings and preoccupation with using substances. My life is no longer controlled by being high, lying, feeling miserable, and then starting the cycle again.

I'm 100 percent committed to my recovery. Even though some days are still hard, I know I can make it through the tough times. I now have a good job, a house, and a family. Additionally, I now have something I never thought I could, sobriety and true happiness.

"Even though some days are still hard, I know I can make it through the tough times."

Lauren Spiro

Director, National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
WASHINGTON, DC



My life has been an unfolding process of searching for my truth and my liberation. A major part of my journey has been looking back with a deeper lens at what happened to me. I was put in a mental institution at age 16 and told that I had an incurable brain disease. The experts, however, were wrong.

My most powerful recovery tool has been to heal my emotional pain by expressing the feelings associated with my early hurtful experiences, and having people really listen to me. Remarkable changes happened when I started learning about oppression and the damage it had done to my life. I had been stuck in monologue, and no one knew how to engage me in dialogue. Eventually I learned to express myself and discover who I was born to be. I reclaimed my full self and mind, and I learned that there was nothing wrong with me. Today, with more clarity, I understand what happened to me. I continue to learn how to believe more deeply in myself.

I now serve as the director of the **National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery (NCMHR)**, which was formed in 2006 as a united voice for people with who have experienced mental health recovery. We are 32 States strong; we have a voice on Capitol Hill; and we have a seat at White House policy meetings. We are spreading emotional CPR around the world, teaching people how to assist others through an emotional crisis.

I have also earned a master's in clinical and community psychology, and I am an artist who has awakened to the power of creative expression as a tool to transform society. I have devoted my life's work to changing the mental health system so that it better meets the genuine needs of people.

Laurie Dhue

Veteran Broadcast Journalist

NEW YORK, NY



I drank alcohol for the better part of 20 years. That's 7,300 days. From the outside, I had it all: my own show on Fox News Channel along with a healthy salary, a beautiful apartment, nice clothes, the ability to travel whenever I wanted, and family and friends who loved me. But inside I was dead. If I wasn't drinking, I was thinking about a drink or recovering from drinking. Booze was my best friend. It made me a lot of promises and told me a lot of lies.

After hitting bottom, I began seeing an addiction psychiatrist and was introduced to a program of recovery by a friend who had achieved what I wanted. I have nearly 5 years of sobriety and am astonished – and delighted – to say that the desire to drink has been eliminated. I take it one day at a time, comforted by a huge support system that includes fellow recovering alcoholics, family, friends, and colleagues.

After my anonymity was broken in early 2011, I decided to embrace the opportunity to go public with my battle with alcoholism. I went on The Today Show to share the message that addiction doesn't discriminate, that people don't have to suffer in silence, and that help is available. My goal then and now is to put a human face on this treatable disease and chip away at the misconceptions that still very much exist in our society. I want to do whatever it takes to increase awareness and educate those who do not understand that this disease affects many American families in one way or another.

I am a proud member of the **Caron Foundation's** New York Advisory Board, the **National Youth Recovery Foundation**, and the Bridge Way sober high school in Philadelphia. I give speeches and host recovery events around the country. This work has become the most important part of my life.

I am filled with gratitude to be part of the solution, and thankful that I'm finally becoming the woman I was meant to be.

Martin Miller

Counselor, Adcare Hospital of Worcester
WORCESTER, MA



My story of addiction began at age 12 when I started drinking and smoking marijuana. I had just moved to a new city, which meant starting a new school and making new friends. I wanted to fit in. By age 14, I was experimenting with other drugs. At 15, I started using opiates, and at 16, I was addicted to heroin and dropped out of high school. A year later, I was incarcerated for heroin possession. There would be many more drug-related offenses to follow, resulting in more than 10 years of incarceration over the next 35 years. Lost and lonely on the inside, I was mean and tough on the outside. I found myself in a cycle of drug addiction, treatment, and incarceration.

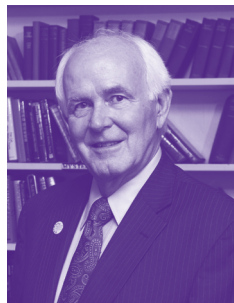
Eventually, long-term treatment offered me the foundation for a life in recovery. Now I am 10 years in recovery; I completed my bachelor's degree at the University of Massachusetts in June 2011 and am currently entering my second semester at Springfield College, working toward a master's degree in social work. I am a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor and a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor II.

I also became involved with **Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (MOAR)** 6 years ago. I feel that becoming a visible, vocal advocate for improved addiction treatment and education, as well as public awareness, is essential to my newfound purpose in life.

Today, thanks to my recovery, I am a valuable, responsible member of society who is an employed, tax-paying voter and involved in my community. I am a man with honor, dignity, integrity, and respect. I am living proof that treatment works and recovery is possible. Each day of recovery, I feel victorious with much gratitude.

Mike Barry

CEO, People Advocating Recovery
LOUISVILLE, KY



I loved to party when I was in school in the late 60s. I was also responsible, made good grades, and began a radio and television career, becoming a highly respected television news anchorman and producer. I worked in Nashville, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.

Little did I know that alcoholism was taking control of my life by my early 20s. I started drinking my way through jobs, moving from city to city to start over. I ran away from my problems mentally, morally, and physically. I burned so many bridges that I eventually found myself living in a homeless shelter with nothing but the clothes on my back.

On October 7, 1994, I barricaded myself in my apartment for over a week and decided to drink myself to death. I ran out of hope. I was at a turning point in my life, although I didn't know it.

My family, friends, minister, and psychiatrist had all tried to help me, but I wouldn't let them. But one moment of clarity led me to ask God just one more time for help. No bargaining, no promises, just surrender. It was truly a spiritual experience.

Today, I'm a person in long-term recovery, which means I haven't had a drink in more than 17 years. I am happy, and life is good. I have so much less materially, but I have so much more internally. I am happily married, have my own business, my children are speaking to me, and I have a beautiful granddaughter who has never seen me drunk.

Each day I continue to work hard on my recovery and love every minute of it. I speak about my experience wherever I can. I share my strength and hope so that others will find inspiration that there is a solution. While sometimes this process helps me more than others, it also reminds me daily of what things were like and who I was, but more importantly, who I've become.

Molly Cisco

Executive Director, Grassroots Empowerment Project
MADISON, WI



I knew from an early age that I was not like other kids. There was an emptiness deep inside of me that felt like a big black scary hole. One of my earliest memories of the hole was when I was laying on a snow bank looking at the stars and wishing I did not exist. I was a very sad little girl, but that was a secret and it was too scary to tell. Instead, I learned how to act very happy. I was the class clown, the fun girl to invite to sleepovers.

My secret remained for years, until everything fell apart. Wanting to die is no way to live, so I decided to live. After I felt completely safe, I slowly told my therapist that I had a secret. She taught me how to save my life, find a new way of living in this world, and become who I wanted to be.

After confiding in her, I worked hard at self-discovery and recovery. I learned that I loved to garden so much that I did it every day for a whole summer. I began working again, and my job led me to lots of people who understood my experiences. I built a circle of friends who believed in me, cared about me, and with whom I could share my secret. The big black scary hole became so small that I forgot it was there.

Some call it mental illness, others call it trauma. I think that I wasn't loved for a long time, but now I give and receive love. I have a full and happy life. I have my friends, my new family, a home, a career, and my dogs. The hole is still there from time to time, but now I know what to do to make it small again.

Nancy Bassett

Director, Kingdom Recovery Center
ST. JOHNSBURY, VT



I am a person in long-term recovery, which for me means that I haven't used substances for more than 11 years. Recovery has changed my life.

Alcohol never appealed to me, but when the "hippie era" started, I experimented with everything. I met a Marine veteran who was also experimenting with drugs and soon found myself using opiates. We got married and had a son. Throughout my son's childhood we were able to keep the drugs in the background, but when he graduated and moved away, we didn't have to hide our drug use anymore. Eventually, we realized that heroin was running our life.

When my husband went to rehab, I went to buy drugs one last time. Coming back, the Vermont drug task force was waiting for me. I was sentenced to a 9-month drug program located in the Federal Correctional Institution in Connecticut. I walked in and saw three tiers of bars. I felt as though I was in a bad TV movie.

On my third day in the drug unit, I was called to the chaplain's office and was told that my husband of 30 years had overdosed and died the night before. This finally made me aware of what my addiction could do to me. It took me to jails, institutions, and near death, but I knew I wanted to live.

When I went home to continue a life in recovery, I was hired for a fantastic job. I still work at the peer-based Kingdom Recovery Center, and I have been the president of Vermont Recovery Center Network numerous times over the past several years.

I am now a respected member of my community, and one day at a time, I work to stay on the path of recovery. Life is good.

Nemasa Asetra

Aspiring Author

NEW ORLEANS, LA



Living with a mental health condition can have devastating effects. It can strike anyone at any time in life, regardless of race, social or economic status, or other factors. Some people may think it will never happen to them.

My mental illness began in 1989. I was first diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia; however, I also suffered with depression but it was not discovered until years later. I went without treatment for my conditions because I did not want to feel like a zombie. As an adoptee, I recently learned that my birth mom is mentally ill as well and is a ward of the public guardian system in her state.

After years filled with numerous visits to Martin Luther King/Drew Hospital in California, I decided to do the right thing and seek treatment for my mental health issues. Although I relapsed in 1995, I continued again toward recovery in 1997. I finally came to my senses and realized the importance of medication management and some type of therapy. Although there have been challenges along the way, I continued to receive treatment and learned the vital lesson that I could not get well if I stopped taking medication just because I felt like it.

Plain and simple, medication management and psychotherapy have helped me stay on the path of recovery from my mental health conditions. I'm an aspiring author with an autobiography detailing my mental health issues, and I advocate for the mentally ill. I am now 45 years old and living life to the fullest.

Oryx Cohen

Technical Assistance Center Director, National Empowerment Center
LAWRENCE, MA



In the fall of 1999, at age 26, I had my first of two major spiritual and emotional life crises. I had just moved 3,000 miles from my familiar life in Oregon to attend graduate school in Massachusetts and reinvent myself.

One week later, after little sleep and several strange experiences, I totally lost grip on physical reality. I even convinced myself that I could fly my car, leading to a near-fatal car crash where I was air-lifted to the nearest trauma unit.

Soon afterwards, I was thrust into a system that didn't see me as a whole person with a story to tell. Instead I was a collection of symptoms, a diagnosis. For me, this just piled additional trauma onto the traumatic experiences I was already having.

The major pieces of my recovery have been peer and family support, sleep, reading literature about recovery, exercise, holistic alternatives, diet, and having meaningful work helping others. Recovery is a very individual process, and some strategies work for some but not others. I found it was helpful to try different alternatives like yoga, acupuncture, Reiki, and meditation to see what worked best.

Because of strong family support, I was able to leave the hospital system fairly quickly and begin slowly rebuilding my life. I returned to graduate school and earned my master's degree in public administration. After graduating, I co-founded the Freedom Center and currently work with the National Empowerment Center. Now, I'm married, a homeowner, have two young children, and have been fully recovered for 10 years.

Sandra Huffman

Founder, Sandra's Walk for Recovery
NATIONWIDE



I was adopted by a family that battled alcohol, substance use, and mental health issues. At age 7, I began to misuse the prescription medication given to me. I can remember sneaking downstairs and making up stories to take more.

I ran away when I was 14 and had my first child at 15, and soon after, gave her up for adoption. I spent almost 35 years of my life living with addiction and alcohol issues, managing to get married twice and have two more children. Most, if not all, of my relationships ended in violence and chaos.

By my late 30s, I started going to jail. This is where I was introduced to the Broward County Drug Court System and Judge Marcia Beach. While she could never force me to get clean and sober, she did love me until I could love myself. I learned to take those first steps that I needed to come into a life of recovery.

After exiting the drug court program, I sought out every program in the county so I could stay on the right path. I joined a 12-step fellowship, listened and took suggestions, got involved, and stayed involved.

I spent the next 2 years trying to build a new life, but soon faced the judgments that surround the recovery community. When I needed a second part-time job and was turned away from delivering pizzas because of my arrests stemming directly from addiction, I had enough.

Step by step, day by day, I got better and carried my story on my sleeve, and the misconceptions faded away. Now almost 6 years into sobriety, I fight for all recovering families and will continue to do so until my very last breath.

In recovery, I found my birth family. My birth mother and seven siblings, as well as the daughter I gave up for adoption, are all in my life. At age 45, I am a person living a life of long-term recovery. I am no longer a liability to my community, I am an asset.

Sarah Rayer

Consultant

WASHINGTON, DC



Recovery has been the greatest gift of my life. I am grateful to have more than 10 years in recovery. I grew up in a small town, and my first social drink was a keg party in the woods.

It was cold and dark, but I remember how I felt like I could talk to boys and have fun without feeling insecure. The next morning I felt terrible, but from that point on, drinking was a part of my social life. After my mother committed suicide one week after I graduated from college, drinking became an escape. I wanted something to take the pain away. I didn't know how to live in the world.

When I was 25, I hit bottom. The pain of drinking outweighed any comfort it provided. On a cold January day, my sister drove me to the **Caron Foundation**. That was the start of my journey and learning to heal. I left rehab on Valentine's Day and attended my first **Alcoholics Anonymous** meeting. The day of my first anniversary in recovery I cried the whole day, I was so grateful to be sober.

Today I work in recovery advocacy, and I try to help people who are experiencing the suffering I once did. My life today isn't always easy, but I know that my recovery and the support I have in my life today can carry me through any situation life brings to me.

"The day of my first anniversary in recovery I cried the whole day, I was so grateful to be sober."

Susan Rogers

Director, National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse
PHILADELPHIA, PA

In 1975, my family, fearing (with cause) that I was suicidal, brought an outreach team from the local hospital to my apartment. After a brief conversation, I was told that I could either enter the hospital "voluntarily" or involuntarily. Offered this "choice," I agreed to go "voluntarily," and was taken to the locked psychiatric ward of the nearby general hospital.

Hearing the key turn in the lock while I was on the wrong side of the door terrified me; but the camaraderie with my roommates was healing and, despite an episode of forced drugging, I managed to retain some hope.

During a second hospitalization, in 1976, I met a caring psychologist whom I continued to see for the next 7 years. I had lucked into a 2-for-1 deal – a friend and a helpful partner in my treatment.

A third lucky break was that a former employer offered me my job back, although I told him I was calling from a psych ward. It wasn't only his faith in me that helped; it was also the job, where I stayed for 8 years and was repeatedly promoted. Having a job I enjoyed and where my work was respected was enormously satisfying.

In 1976, I moved into a political collective and met Joseph Rogers, now well known as a longtime leader in the consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) movement but then a 24-year-old community organizer. We went from mutual support to a 15-year marriage. Despite our divorce, our partnership continues: he is the executive director and I am the director of the **National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse**, a peer-run national technical assistance center funded by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**.

Having control over my own life has been central to my recovery. Except for my time in the hospital, I have had the freedom to choose my companions, my home, my occupation, my amusements, and my political affiliations. I have also had the power to decide whether or not to seek professional help (and from whom) and whether or not to take medication (and which ones), and over the last 36 years I have done both. Sometimes it has helped, sometimes not so much. But in every instance I had the power to choose, which has made all the difference.

Thomas Gilbert

**CEO and President, TouchStone Intervention
& Professional Services**

TRAVERSE CITY, MI



I was a former prosecuting attorney, criminal defense attorney, and judge when I went to a Rolling Stones concert in 2002 and smoked a joint. I was observed by a constituent who rightfully reported my actions, leading to a public statement and a year and a half of total public humiliation. The story took on a life of its own, which hurt a lot of people. The story was voted the No. 1 news story in my local newspaper both in 2003 and 2004. Jay Leno and the Tonight Show joked about the "pot-smoking judge." There were multiple radio shows about the whole situation. I decided to take this opportunity to remain focused on recovery and be responsible for my actions. That's what it took for me to get treatment and commit to recovery.

I am now in long-term recovery from alcoholism and addiction to marijuana. That means I have not had a drink or drug in more than 9 years, am actively working a program of recovery, and am living a life beyond my wildest dreams.

With a master's degree in addiction counseling, I help families throughout the country with interventions and chemical dependency counseling, and run a small legal practice for people in the recovery community. I speak out against the misconception of addiction and try on a daily basis to be an example of the solution. My life has never been better, and this can be a reality for everyone because addiction is a treatable disease and recovery is possible.

"My life has never been better, and this can be a reality for everyone because addiction is a treatable disease and recovery is possible."

Todd Crandell PC, LCD III

Founder and President, Racing for Recovery
SYLVANIA, OH



My 13-year struggle with drugs and alcohol nearly destroyed my life, devastating relationships with family and friends and shattering the promise of a professional hockey career. I quit using drugs and alcohol on April 15, 1993, and have been in recovery and a champion for it ever since.

In the process of rebuilding my life, I realized that I needed something more than traditional recovery programs. I chose the most grueling sport imaginable, the Ironman triathlon, which consists of a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, and 26.2 mile run. I ran my first triathlon in 1999 and have never stopped.

I have completed 20 full-length Ironman triathlons across the world. In 2008, I was the only person in the world to complete the Ultraman Hawaii triathlon, which is a 3-day test of endurance consisting of 6.2 miles of swimming and 90 miles of biking on the first day, 171.2 miles of biking on day 2, and 52.4 miles of running on day 3. Six days later, I completed Ironman Western Australia. In 2009, I completed Ultraman Canada and became 1 of 25 individuals in the world to have completed both Ultraman triathlons.

In 2001, my experience with running these triathlon events and inspiring others on their road to recovery led me to form the nonprofit organization **Racing for Recovery**. I've also chronicled my experiences in my book, *From Addict to Ironman*, and two documentaries, *ADDICT* and *Running with Demons*.

Racing for Recovery offers professional counseling services and sponsors support group meetings and events across the United States to promote a lifestyle of fitness and sobriety. I regularly speak to groups and individuals to convey one important message – “With recovery, anything is possible.”

Xavier Virsu

The McLeod Center
MARION, NC

My battle with addiction was always a matter of me falling down, and then picking myself up again. I tried to quit on my own several times, but it always seemed that I would lose my resolve rather quickly. When my wife found out she was pregnant, I made the decision to seek help because I had failed so many times on my own. This time I was determined not to fail.

Medication-assisted recovery was the best option for me. Methadone helps me not to be sick, and significantly reduces my desire to use opiates. Now in recovery, I am working and at home with my family where I should be, instead of roaming the streets. I have a counselor who understands addiction, and just having someone lend a sympathetic ear takes a load off my shoulders. My counselor educates me on dependency and has helped me to find triggers and identify the situations that led me to use substances. Medication, along with support from my counselor, has helped me to break the cycle of substance use and become closer to my family.

I continue to be committed to recovery because my family is the most important thing in my life. I want to start a new chapter in my life defined by supporting my wife and helping my son grow into adulthood. Medication-assisted recovery has allowed me to go to college and work toward a degree to better support my family. Recovery has given me the chance to accomplish things I never thought were possible.